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Planning and Changing
Vol. 35, No. 3&4, 2004 pp. 154–168

LEARNING FROM SUCCESS: A LEVERAGE FOR TRANSFORMING SCHOOLS INTO LEARNING COMMUNITIES

> Every time I visit one of the schools under my supervision, I ask the principal and his or her staff to write down all the problems at school, so I can help them solve these problems. I never thought to ask for their successes as a mode for learning.
>
> A School District Superintendent

Introduction

To survive, and certainly to thrive in turbulent and uncertain environments, teachers must learn to learn, and thereby develop their abilities to engage in ongoing learning. One way of doing so is to recognize and act upon the importance of learning as a continuous collective process. As Daft and Weick (1984) suggest, in order to overcome the complexities they face, school practitioners have to introduce and maintain continuous social processes of learning through which they can become members of collective interpretation systems. Hence, sharing and generating multiple interpretations with regard to school professional practices can help practitioners to do justice to their professional mission.

There is much promise in focusing on collective learning from past school experiences (i.e., retrospective learning). Put simply, learning from past experiences is of the utmost importance as educators strive to have a positive impact on their students. Somewhat surprisingly, retrospective learning has traditionally been focused on failures and difficulties, whereas successful events and processes have remained relatively unexamined. This primary focus on learning from failed events and processes not only skews teachers' discourse in a negative direction, it also deprives teachers of learning opportunities embedded in past successes and satisfactory events. Although learning from success has been perceived as the enemy of experimentation and innovation (Levitt & March, 1996), the deliberate choice to learn from success can serve as leverage for future integration of collective learning from both success and failure, and from all that lies in between.

Hence, this article will begin by discussing the importance of collective retrospective learning as an inbuilt vehicle in the ongoing pursuit toward learning schools. We will then proceed to explore the predisposition to learn from problems and failures, and pinpoint both the opportunities and obstacles presented by this form of learning. This will be followed by expanding on the limitation and possibilities of learning from successful events. Then, a learning continuum will be proposed in which learning from success can serve as a springboard for further productive collective learning.

Collective Retrospective Learning

Although past experiences can take many and different forms, all shapes of experiences (e.g., planned, incidental) can be associated with practitioners' learning (Cousins, 1998). Virany, Tushman, and Romanelli

(1996) even argue that "learning occurs only after experience has been gained…Actions, even mistakes, provide new information…that forms the basis for learning" (p. 308). Therefore, examining past events (retrospective reviews) is an essential process in fostering learning.

Learning from past experiences requires a process of reconstruction. Practitioners can generate and reorganize professional knowledge through their ongoing discussion of past experiences. Through a process of reflection-on-action (Schon, 1983), practitioners deliberately reflect on specific incidents they experienced, as well as on the effects of their actions on their environments. This "reflection-conversation" process (Grimmett, 1988) creates a dialogue between the cognitive frameworks constructed by practitioners from information in the practice setting and their own existing cognitive frameworks.

The analysis of past experiences leads practitioners not only to a new understanding of practical situations but also to an exploration of preconceived tacit assumptions about teaching (Grimmett, 1988). Consequently, learning from past experiences leads to a better self-understanding, a better understanding of the teaching profession, and a better integration between the two. Reflective conversations about past experiences are thus the building blocks of professional development. They shape, construct, and reconstruct the cognitive habits of practitioners in educational enterprises.

Nevertheless, literature on human information processing points out that individual retrospective reviews may lead to incorrect inferences, and to inadequate and unintelligent behavior. Simon (1996) characterizes the limitation of individual cognitive capacity when facing complex social demands as "bounded rationality." This limitation is a major obstacle to effective retrospective reviews (Bubsy, 1999). If individual learning from past experiences can be misleading, then collective retrospective learning, which provides new and diverse perspectives for interpreting past experiences, is one means suggested to counteract possible distortions (Levitt & March, 1996).

When intentionally designed, collective retrospective reviews create what Daft and Weick (1984) refer to as interpretation systems. In this regard, Brown and Duguid (1996) assert that constructing the reality of organizations, such as schools, should be based on shared narration (recounting past experiences) collectively discussed among the faculty. Collective retrospective reviews are forums where members of an organization can make sense out of their experiences within their specific context. These inter-negotiations of beliefs and opinions evaluate multiple perspectives, check errors, and consequently stimulate new insights. Huber (1996) claims that collective retrospective reviews can be an important organizational mechanism for promoting double-loop learning, which is a process of inquiring into underlying assumptions and strategies.

This collective sense-making process, according to Bubsy (1999), has a number of functions: (a) to explore why and how things went wrong [or right]; (b) to formulate remedies; (c) to enrich the communal knowledge; and (d) to provide a platform for interpretations of organizational history in a more open and secure space, which is less possible in the daily course of work. Furthermore, collective retrospective reviews allow practitioners to

demonstrate their concern with organizational functions and their effects on these functions. In this sense, besides enriching cognitive schemas, such collective retrospective reviews also provide a space for acknowledging commitment to organizational vision and practices.

The above mentioned functions are of special relevance to school communities where knowledge, whether enacted formally or informally, deliberately or unintentionally, is constructed through collective interpretation of experiences shared among school members (Louis, 1994). Thus, social interaction within collegial networks creates professional communities in schools (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1994). Ben-Peretz and Schonmann (1998) argue that "[t]hrough telling their stories and sharing their experiences, [teachers] stimulate and support each other in constructing and shaping professional knowledge" (p. 52). Put differently, collective retrospective learning is of the utmost importance in transforming the image and reality of the isolated teacher into one of "interactive professionalism" around issues of teaching and learning (Fullan, 1993, 2000). Hence, collective retrospective reviews within schools not only create an opening for the development of professional practice. They also create opportunities for educators at all levels of the school hierarchy to have a direct impact on school policy and processes. Although not the focus of this article, it is important to note that the above mentioned value of collective learning from past experiences should be evaluated in light of its major challenges, such as time constraints, fragmented vision, team competitiveness, and teacher attitudes about the worth of this learning process (DiPardo, 1997; Kruse & Louis, 1997; Leonard & Leonard, 2002).

The Predisposition to Learn From Failures and Problems

The predisposition to learn from past problems and failures is rooted in diverse sources, especially in those that view learning as a process of problem solving. Dewey asserts that reflection and inquiry arise from a state of doubt, perplexity, or uncertainty that calls for a resolution of the difficulty. "The function of reflective thought is, therefore, to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity, doubt, conflict, disturbance of some sort, into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious" (Dewey, 1933, pp. 100-101). Dewey's moral philosophy formulates methods for dealing with problematic situations within human experience and condition (Gouinlock, 1992), which arise when the individual's ongoing activity is impeded and disrupted.

The claim that past failures are an essential prerequisite for learning has been made explicit in the fields of social psychology and organizational behavior (Ellis & Davidi, 1999). For example, Kolb (1984) argues that perceived discomfort and perplexity serve as a stimulus for growth, while Feldman (1989) considers noticing errors as necessary for learning. According to Dodgson (1993), conflict has been perceived in psychological learning theories as an essential condition for triggering a learning process. Even the Quality Movement acknowledges learning as a collection of problem-solving heuristics and techniques (Winter, 1996). We can also notice this tendency in Argyris and Schon's (1996) definition of organizational learning as a

mechanism of detecting and correcting errors. Similarly, Cyert and March (1963) observed that organizational learning is initiated in response to perceived problems. Put differently, learning is triggered especially when performance levels deteriorate or an upcoming breakdown is perceived (Winter, 1996).

As just stated, people tend to engage in conscious learning when they are frustrated in light of failures and disruptions. In other words, individuals generate various hypotheses as a result of facing problems, frustrations, and unexpected failures (Louis & Sutton, 1991). Thus, unpleasant and undesirable events serve as a trigger for conscious post-action reviews (attention, awareness, reflection, hypothesis testing), and stimulate a process of sense-making (Hastie, 1984; Lau & Russell, 1980; Mahenswaran & Chaiken, 1991). A time of crisis, in this regard, can be perceived as the ultimate motivator for learning. This reflects the tendency of management literature to view learning as centered on problem solving, thereby eliminating undesired conditions (Kofman & Senge, 1993).

As in other disciplines of inquiry, learning from experience in schoolwork has been associated with tackling problems. Learning in schools takes place when individuals and groups confront problems and develop solutions (Marks & Louis, 1999). Accordingly, "[i]f schools are going to truly fulfill their mandates, [they will need] to function effectively in *problem-solving* teams" (Reed, Kinzie, & Ross, 2001, p. 71, emphasis added). Moreover, learning in the form of communal deliberations has been perceived as "the method by which most everyday practical problems get solved" (Schwab, 1978, p. 43). Likewise, Walker (1990) emphasizes practical problems as the seed for initiating deliberative processes, while Dillon (1994) suggests that teachers deliberate in order to decide how best to solve the problematic circumstance. In this way, learning has become conditioned to focus on experiences that have gone wrong and to approach them from a problem-solving orientation.

Opportunities and Obstacles Generated by Learning From Failures and Problems

Numerous authors emphasize the virtue of problems and failures for learning. Sitkin (1996) argues that failure stimulates higher willingness to consider alternatives, and to critique traditional work patterns. Said in another way, learning from failure has been associated with risk seeking and experimentation, which are especially effective for stimulating double-loop learning. Thus, failure stimulates an unfreezing process (Schein, 1992) necessary for initiating learning. There is also evidence that information which reflects problems and failures is more salient to the performer than information indicating success. Lant and Mezias (1992) found that the impetus for learning and change is triggered by performance below aspiration level. Failure unequivocally and explicitly signals that results are problematic, thus demanding change. "Whereas a successful formula fosters little or no impetus to alter existing routines and policies, the experience of failure produces a learning readiness that is difficult to produce without a felt need for corrective action" (p. 548). This corresponds to Lounamaa and March's

(1987) assertion that practitioners treat "performance improvements as confounded but treat performance decrements as containing information" (p. 116). For this reason, in a trial and error learning process, change in behavior is more likely when performance is below aspiration level, generally perceived as failure.

While problems and failures can be stimuli for reflection and learning, they are also associated with responses of denial and avoidance. Sitkin (1996) asserts that it is common sense that failure should be avoided (see also Weick, 1984). The risks inherent in failure increase the tendency of organizational members to avoid facing them with an open mind. Failure avoidance norms, risk aversion, denial of bad news, and retrospective revision of negative past organizational actions, to mention only a few, are common responses in a culture where failure is not tolerated and admitted. Particularly in large scale failures, practitioners are more self-protective, less in search of new alternatives. In addition, an ongoing and persistent subjective sense of failure among organizational members produces instability in beliefs and disagreement with respect to both preferences and actions (Sproull, Weiner, & Wolf, 1978), both of which interfere with efforts to generate productive collective learning from past experiences.

In schools too, negative events can be experienced either as an opportunity or as a threat. Report of poor results on matriculation exams, for instance, may encourage faculty to start thinking about the teaching methods they are offering. But it can also raise anxiety, fear, and uncertainty that can inhibit learning (Karsten, Voncken, & Voorthuis, 2000). When "a school is submerged in problems, [retrospective reflection] is not going to help it very much" (p.147). In such a state, schools cannot learn much from problems and failures.

Incorporating learning from past failures and problems into organizational practices has been acknowledged as the predominant productive trigger for inquiry, reflection, and change. However, on the same note, the potential threat for practitioners involved in reviewing failures tends to perpetuate the same defensive dynamics that may have contributed to the failure in the first place, restricting authentic inquiry and possible change.

Learning From Success: Limitations and Possibilities

As discussed above, practitioners have tended to focus on their past difficulties, while leaving their successes relatively unexamined. Professional literature has tended to reinforce this pattern. Where professional literature has alluded to learning from success in organizations, it has tended to focus on the problematic dynamics that ensue from success. For example:

1. Success often leads to actions that preserve the status-quo and avoid risk taking. It is harder to motivate people to pursue new practices, which involve possible risk, danger, or embarrassment, when the current practices are quite successful (Sitkin, 1996).
2. Success tends to induce overconfidence in routines that proved to be successful in the past. Consequently, practitioners do not seek or pay attention to new and alternative information that might indicate a need to change routines (Sitkin, 1996).

3. Successful events rarely stimulate a conscious search for meaning, since they are processed, if at all, on "automatic pilot" (Ellis & Davidi, 1999).
4. Learning from success produces only first order learning, reducing the likelihood that organizations will respond to environmental change with transformational change (Virany et al., 1996).
5. Success strengthens the homogeneity in organizations. Maintaining the same historical operating procedures and the same personnel makes it harder to experiment in organizational routines (Sitkin, 1996).

Without denying the validity of the above claims, this bias against learning from success too often blinds professionals and organizations from a wealth of learning opportunities embedded in their own practices. These opportunities to learn from success can serve as a springboard that generates the climate, skills, and knowledge necessary for developing ongoing collective learning that could lead to improved student outcomes. In this vein, four considerations on the benefits of collective learning from success will be discussed.

Learning From Success Can Reduce Defensiveness and Enhance Dialogue and Motivation

A continuous inquiry into successful events occurs not under external pressure (as is the case in failed events), but under voluntary intrinsic interest in initiating and participating in a learning process. Hence, practitioners are more inclined to investigate successful events, as a source of comfort and motivation, rather than to delve immediately into the emotional and cognitive stress involved with failed events. Moreover, the pressure associated with reviewing failed events directs cognitive attention toward seeking immediate causes, while reviewing successful events allows for a more open, creative, and reflective approach during which practitioners can let down some of their defensiveness and open themselves to exploring and questioning themselves and others. "Whereas failures trigger an immediate search for causes in order to justify them, successes may encourage a more systematic and less biased analysis of learners' mental models" (Ellis & Davidi, 1999, p. 9).

Another aspect can be found in Sitkin's (1996) argument that success enhances confidence and persistence, and stimulates a coordinated pursuit toward reaching common goals. Learning from success may provide secure and stable grounds for the initiation of future activity. Knowing that a specific action was successful, practitioners are more confident in their competence and achievement and are highly motivated and satisfied. In this regard, learning from successful events awakens a sense of professional pride and competence, reaffirming teachers' commitment to their professional mission.

In schools, the focus on learning from success can bring to light positive recognition of faculty's expertise that underlies their successes. The collective learning generated from the intentional focus on past successes fosters a shared belief in the capacity of the school and its staff to succeed in their tasks and to learn from their experiences. Thus, learning from success

reinforces the learning competence of practitioners and instills in them appreciation, respect, and even wonder at the value of their own and their students' accomplishments, so frequently taken for granted. In other words, focusing on successes of school members strengthens a positive reinforcing feedback-cycle. Collective learning from success instills a sense of personal efficacy within teachers and among them as a group.

The discovery of successes, however small, especially in significant areas of school life in which the school finds itself at an impasse, seems to open the way to new activity and movement precisely in those areas. The experience of moving beyond what had been an impasse provides the staff with the essential sense of efficacy and tools for taking an active role in shaping the school's future. This identification of success in important areas of activity that previously elicited a great degree of frustration and helplessness revitalizes investments in these areas.

Learning from success creates optimism, cashes in on often hidden generosity and desire to contribute to others. Learning from success can shift and even transform the process of discourse in and about practice. This process reinforces the readiness and desire for engaging in collective ongoing learning (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995). In other words, the process of learning from success can be utilized as an opportunity for the school to meaningfully and positively engage all of its stakeholders in rhetorical and operational involvement in school practices. This, in turn, creates an atmosphere of reciprocity, which removes hierarchical barriers that tend to bar joint learning ventures.

Learning From Success Can Generate Reflection and Transformation

Learning from success is most meaningful when the successes reflected upon are precisely those in which there is an element of surprise, of dissonance from mainstream practices. Just as learning from failure can lead to the questioning of accepted practices, so can learning from success lead to inquiring into tacit assumptions by focusing on those practices that are distinctly different and more successful than accepted ones. The dissonance experience is the successful event rather than the failed one (Rosenfeld, 1996). The surprise emanates from engagement in re-visiting, decoding, and then explicating the many unnoticed actions that made success possible in the first place (Rosenfeld & Sykes, 1998; Rosenfeld & Sykes, in press).

Furthermore, to a certain extent, practitioners and agencies tend to accept the impossibility of achieving meaningful positive outcomes. When this belief becomes rooted in the agency's culture, the mainstream practice becomes one that is oriented to accept failure. In many organizational contexts, such as urban schools that are labeled low-performing, it is precisely the successes of practitioners that possess the potential for transformation. Put differently, educators in certain contexts may come to accept failure to achieve desirable outcomes as inevitable. Under such circumstances, learning from successful events can serve as a trigger for stimulating conscious reflection both on underlying assumptions, and on the actions that have the capacity to create unexpected positive results.

Learning From Success Can Enhance Awareness of Effective Practices

Learning from success starts by identifying instances in organizational life in which desired outcomes were achieved, particularly when those outcomes were the product of effective professional action. In contrast to evaluating failures and near failures in order to prevent them from future occurrence (a classical approach of risk management), the goal of learning from success is to perpetuate and reinforce these successes (a classic approach of quality improvement) (Sasa, 1996). The focus is therefore on desired outcomes, and what has been done in the past in order to achieve them.

The key to learning from success is a shift from "selective inattention," whereby these successful instances are ignored by professionals, to "selective attention," or deliberately focusing on successes in order to uncover the implicit wisdom that made them possible. Demanding conscious explanations from successful events stimulates more hypotheses concerning the performance. Individuals become aware of their own expertise, and the expertise of others, and begin to develop a refined awareness of the detailed ways in which it finds expression in their practice. This provides more valid information concerning the connection between action and consequences, greatly needed in educational settings. Clearer connection between action and consequences facilitates and enhances more accurate feedback in an atmosphere of accountability.

Learning From Success Can Create Positive Organizational Memory

Collective learning from success can solve the dilemma of whether and how individual leaning can be integrated into the organizational level of learning. Communicating successes at the collective arena provides practitioners with an opportunity to share their own memory, reflect and interpret it, and consequently act upon it (Kolb, 1984). Thus, successful practices are shared and stored into organizational memory (e.g., teaching practices, resource room, documents, stories, artifacts) serving as a database from which practitioners can draw professional knowledge relevant to their work. Interestingly, this learning mechanism serves as an organizational 'brain' that collects information from individual teachers into a common shared knowledge. The process of learning from success, then, encodes individual pedagogical practices into a collective mind that is distinct from the individual mind and surpasses it.

Learning From Success to Leverage a Learning Continuum

Schools have often focused on past failures and problems as a means to reconstruct their future. In this way, learning has been predisposed to a process of detecting and correcting errors. This problem-oriented inquiry has conditioned learning exclusively to things that have gone wrong. In this regard, Cook and Yanow (1996) argue that contemplating only on what went wrong is not necessarily relevant and sufficient to organizational life. Ellis and Davidi (1999), in a study on two companies of soldiers taking

a ground navigation course, found that the pace of improvement in navigation exercises was significantly greater in the balanced reviews (contemplating on both failed and successful events) than in the unbalanced event reviews (contemplating only on failed events). This inquiry revealed that the balanced reviews had a positive effect on learning from failure as well. This suggests that focusing on both learning from failure and learning from success fosters better results in a turbulent environment. Schools may benefit when learning from both successful events and failed ones because "[s]uccess fosters reliability, whereas failure fosters resilience" (Sitkin, 1996, p. 551). Learning from success and learning from failure thus complement and nourish one another.

In this regard, Miner and Mezias (1996) recognize that learning is dependent on the circumstances, rather than being regarded as appropriate or inappropriate. Both learning from success and learning from failure need to be employed in light of unique organizational characteristics. We can no longer depend solely on either learning from success or learning from failure as a source for learning, but rather evaluate the unique conditions in each work environment when deciding the better path to pursue.

Although considering both learning from failure and learning from success as productive resources for collective learning, practitioners in a turbulent environment can benefit by initiating learning processes with a focus on learning from success, as a stepping-stone towards developing the capacity to deliberate productively on failures and problems. We can envision a continuum: from learning from successes, to learning from small-minor failures, to learning from large scale and acute failures. Early learning from failures, according to this perspective, can be fatal to any collective retrospective learning, whereas initiating an early process of learning from success tends to become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Lant & Mezias, 1992). In this way, learning from success can serve as a springboard for future productive learning.

Learning from successful events lays the groundwork for learning from failed events. Inducing learning from failure, without prior experience in learning from success, resembles asking a first grade pupil to write the entire alphabet at the end of the first week of school (Schechter, 2001). Therefore, without prior positive experiences in learning from success, learning from failure will fall upon deaf ears. This illuminates the importance of single-loop learning (instrumental learning that leaves the existing values and norms unchanged), generally produced by learning from success, to serve as a springboard for double-loop learning (learning that generates change in fundamental values and norms), generally produced by learning from failure. Learning from daily and sometimes unnoticed successes can provide the resources and experiences to encourage future productive learning from failed events. In other words, productive learning from past experiences should be based on and nurtured by the gradually evolving learning from past successful experiences.

Although we recognize the necessity to reach a level of learning from failure, we tend to forget that "[f]ailure was born of success" (Nonaka, 1985, p. 13), and therefore, a conscious reflection on successful events is essential in establishing productive learning in school communities. In addi-

tion, Virany et al. (1996) argue that high performing organizations are "distinct in that they initiate second-order learning not in response to performance decline, but either in anticipation of environmental change or as a response to elevated performance" (p. 325). In this regard, whereas moderately performing schools tend to learn in response to real performance crisis (failure), we hypothesize that high performing schools are proactive; that is, they also learn from successful events as a means of anticipating environmental change.

The Principal's Role

Effective change takes place when practitioners, through a nonthreatening, collective endeavor, are able to learn from their experiences. It demands establishing a space for the emergence of collective learning (Field, 1997). Principals need to create institutionalized arrangements for collective learning from success by allocating time, space, and resources. More specifically, principals need to establish institutionalized structures and procedures that allow teachers to collectively acquire, analyze, disseminate, store-code, retrieve, and use successful professional practices relevant to their performance in school (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998). In other words, in order to improve pedagogical practices, it is imperative to have spaces (Issacs, 1999) where practitioners can share their professional expertise that led to their successes.

When attending collective forums, members often fail to express and test their assumptions and to communicate nondefensively, and thus their "learning," if it occurs, involves tension (Argyris & Schon, 1996). These learning disabilities (Senge, 1990), or dysfunctional learning habits (Louis, 1994), function "in a self-maintaining, self-reinforcing pattern that is anti-learning and noncorrective" (Argyris, 1993, p. 243). Therefore, school learning mechanisms (institutionalized arrangements), by themselves, cannot produce meaningful and beneficial outcomes for the organization (e.g., improved teaching capabilities). Put differently, institutionalizing these learning routines into standard operating procedures does not necessarily improve the organization (Feldman & March, 1981). Hence, principals are not only responsible for institutionalizing tangible learning mechanisms (time and space), but also for nurturing the more intangible-abstract culture that ensures the productivity of learning mechanisms (Popper & Lipshitz, 1998). School principals' main challenge is to use the learning from success approach to reduce the impact of defensive routines that guide people's behavior (Argyris & Schon, 1996). Effective reflexive spaces in school, therefore, are contingent on the principal's role in promoting an awareness of effective practices as leverage for productive collective learning.

Furthermore, it is well known that teachers do not necessarily share the same beliefs and values about what is successful or not; thus, one teacher's perceived success may be another's perceived failure. When participants classify their colleagues' experiences into either successful or unsuccessful categories, the obligation of administrators is to uncover the potentially rich information residing within each experience. In order to frame inquiries representing different choices derived from competing val-

ues, administrators should serve as gatekeepers for any dispositional ideology, while empowering teachers to share authentically what they perceive as their successful practices. Thus, the leader's role, as proposed by Kofman and Senge (1993), should have a broader perspective of a designer, a steward, and a facilitator.

Conclusion

Much of our professional practice has been shaped by either the almost exclusive focus on damages and problems, or by a frequent failure to recognize and cash in on the strengths, resiliencies, and resources that educators have developed in the course of their work. This bias promotes a shared despair between service providers and recipients, and dissuades both parties from moving 'beyond despair' (Polanski, 1973) to where there is hope. Because practitioners focus on limitations rather than on possibilities, they encourage maintenance of the quasi-stability vested in unsatisfactory situations, and discourage efforts to explore satisfactory experiences.

From the above exploration of the advantages and limitations of learning from either success or failure, the following picture emerges. Problems and failures that challenge practitioners to question the status quo and seek alternative courses of action are the most common triggers to learning, and may potentially lead to double-loop learning. Consequently, failures may be perceived as the ultimate teacher (Abbdel-Halim & Madnick, 1990). However, because of the potential threat involved in acknowledging problems or failures, such opportunities to learn are frequently missed, as practitioners become entrenched in denial and avoidance that maintain a problematic status quo. In other words, failure does not necessarily provide a conducive database for learning (Ellis & Davidi, 1999). Successes, though, especially in organizational contexts in which the achievement of successful outcomes is the exception rather than the rule, are opportunities for transformational learning. Learning from successful practices can become the basis for a re-conceptualization and reorganization of work contexts and policies.

In addition, learning from success has the power to transform teachers' discourse about practice. It takes considerable individual maturity and a deliberately fostered collegiate system (Stevenson, 1992) for organizational members to be able to stay open to learning while discussing their problems or failures with colleagues. In such settings, a tendency toward defensiveness often prevails. It is easier to be forthcoming with colleagues when reflecting retrospectively upon achievements. Indeed, to stay forthcoming with colleagues when reflecting upon achievements, which in turn builds trust, becomes a resource that enhances the capacity of practitioners to learn in the future even in highly threatening times.

Learning from success opens further opportunities for collaboration, inquiry, and engagement with regard to learning and teaching in schools. To adapt to the ever-changing and uncertain environments in which schools operate, the contribution that learning from successful events can make to the development of learning communities should be considered.

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